A

DISSERTATION

UPON THE

ITALIAN POETRY,

In which are interſperſed ſome REMARKS

ON

Mr. VOLTAIRE'S ESSAY

ON THE

EPIC POETS.

Difficile eſt ſatyram non ſcribere. JUV.

By GIUSEPPE BARETTI.

LONDON:

Printed for R. DODSLEY, at *Tully's* Head in *Pall-Mall.*

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A DISSERTATION UPON THE *ITALIAN* POETRY.

WHEN I read Monsieur *de Voltaire*'s ESSAY ON THE EPIC POETRY OF ALL THE EUROPEAN NATIONS FROM HOMER DOWN TO MILTON, * and found it filled with so many contemptuous Reflections on the Language and Works of the *Italians*, I thought

 the

* *London*, printed by *Samuel Jallasson*, 1727.

the Author ſhould rather have written it in his own Language, than have diſhonoured that of *England*, by making it the Conveyance of his Impertinence.

I could not without Aſtoniſhment obſerve, that an Author ſo excellent in his own Language could utter ſo many Abſurdities in *Engliſh*; that a Man ſo circumſpect and judicious when he writes upon *Hiſtory*, which is not his peculiar Province, ſhould be guilty of ſo many groſs Errors when he treats of *Poetry*, which is his true and natural Element.

It could not indeed be expected, that he ſhould perfectly underſtand *Italian*; yet, he is perhaps acquainted with *Latin*, and therefore might have read above fifty of our Authors, who attained to Purity, little inferior to that of *Virgil* himſelf. And, if he hath read them, how could he imagine,

gine, that they who wrote ſo well in a dead Language, ſhould fill their Works with *miſerable Witticiſms*, *Quibbles* and *Conceits* in their own, as he falſly aſſures us? I know not by what Claim he preſumes to depiſe a Nation that ſingly hath done more to re-eſtabliſh Reaſon on her Throne than all the reſt of the World together, and which, if four Ages of Literature be reckoned *, hath had two, and thoſe two the brighteſt, for her own Share.

Yet this daring Critick treats *our* Poets with Contempt, and thoſe Poets too, whoſe Works *have been equally the Delight of the Learned and Ignorant*: A Privilege that only *Homer*, *Shakeſpear*, *Corneille*, and very few others have been able to obtain; and mentions *Arioſto* in the ſame ludicrous

 Stile,

* Mr. *Voltaire*, in his *Siecle de Louis le Grand*, reckons up four Ages of Literature.

Stile, in which the *French Satiriſt* ſpoke of the Abbot *Cotin*.

Beſides thoſe Contumelies Mr. *de Voltaire* hath thrown upon *my* Country in that *Eſſay*, and in others of his Works; I was not a little offended when, in reading the Writings of many other *French* Authors, good and bad, I found an infinite Number of coarſe and unreaſonable Invectives againſt the Productions of *Italy*, and eſpecially againſt thoſe which are in the greateſt Eſteem and Veneration amongſt us.

Stimulated by an honeſt Zeal for the Honour of our Authors, I reſolved to trace the Origin of this, I know not whether to ſay dull Inſenſibility, profound Ignorance, or jealous Diſingenuity in the *French* Nation; and having read many of their Books, I have, in my opinion, diſcovered the *Riſe* and *Progreſs* of the extravagant and unjuſt Cenſure, by which they

have

have ſo long injured *my* Countrymen.

Taſſo was ſcarce dead in *Rome* *, after having filled all *Europe* with his Fame, when *John Baptiſt Marini* began to diſtinguiſh himſelf in *Naples* as a Poet.

This Man, born with an Imagination as ſtrong and lively as *Italy* ever produced, in the Compaſs of a few Years overſpread his Country with his Verſes.

It is indeed a great Loſs to us, that the Judgment of *Marini* was ſo much inferior to his Fancy; had he had ſufficient Diſcernment to know what to chuſe and what to reject, he would have reached as great Excellence in Poetry as any other Poet antient or modern ever did: His Knowledge was

* *T. Taſſo* born in *Surrento* in the Year 1544, died in *Rome* in 1591.

very extenſive in all Sciences, and in all Arts liberal or mechanic; and his Facility in clothing his Thoughts in Rime was wonderful. But he did not ſtudy his Language thoroughly; and not being acquainted with all its ſecret Graces and Powers, he never was able to attain the Art of expreſſing himſelf with that Delicacy, Strength, or Sublimity which his different Thoughts required; nor would he ever take pains to examine thoſe *minute Beauties* of *Homer*, *Virgil*, and other *antient Poets*, which neceſſarily conſtitute the Perfection of the *Whole*: He looked upon their Works as an inaccurate Traveller, who ſeeing a magnificent Palace or Temple, is contented with admiring, in the Groſs, its Heighth, its Bulk, and the Richneſs of the Marble, without attending to the Ingenuity of the Architect which conſiſts in its elegant Proportion, the Symetry of its Parts, and all the other particular Beauties of the Edifice.

Never-

Nevertheleſs, the Luſtre which ſhone in the Works thus pecipitately publiſhed by *Marini*, ſoon dazzled all *Italy*, which at that Time had no other great Poets. The Rabble of Writers, tired with the Correctneſs and Elegance of their Predeceſſors, imagined that he had diſcovered a new and wonderful kind of Poetry; almoſt all of them followed this falſe Guide, and indiſcriminately imitated him.

Ciro of Pers, *Achillini*, *Abati*, *Ciampoli*, *Bruni*, and many others ſoon carried the Extravagance of Thought and Corruption of Stile even farther than *Marini* himſelf. By theſe means, in the Space of about fifty Years, all *Italy* was overſpread with falſe Metaphors, ſtrange Images, Conceits, Puns, and poor Quibbles in Verſe and Proſe to the great Diſhonour of the *Italian Muſes*.

To add to this Misfortune, the Duke of *Savoy* took *Marini* into his Protection, called him to his Court, made him a Knight, and inriched him with Presents.

Marini was a great Friend to *Bentivoglio*, then the Pope's Nuncio to *Lewis* the XIIIth. and afterwards Cardinal *. Being follicited by him in many Letters (which are ſtill extant) he reſolved to viſit the *French* Court. He left *Turin*, taking with him Letters of Recommendation filled with the moſt extravagant Praiſes of his poetical Merit.

In *Paris*, being ſupported by the Credit of the Nuncio, his recommendatory Letters, and yet more by his own Fame, he ſoon became acquainted with all the great Men of the Court, and Perſons of moſt eminent Learning

* See *Bentivoglio*'s Letters, printed at *Cambridge*,

Learning in the City; and, as it was natural for a Stranger, he ſought for, and eaſily obtained the Friendſhip of ſome *Frenchmen*, who, becauſe they underſtood a good deal of the *Italian* Vocabulary, were thought to be well verſed in that Language.

Among others *Menage* and *Chapelain* became very intimate with him. The Knowledge of thoſe two Gentlemen in the *Italian* Letters extended no farther than writing indifferent Proſe and very poor Verſes after the manner of *Paſtor-fido*, and *Filli-di-Sciro*, two Paſtoral-Tragi-Comedies very puerile and cold, and two of the worſt Pieces that were ever written in our Language. This I muſt ſay, without Offence to our *Italian* young Ladies, and our effeminate Men who adore theſe two Performances, only becauſe they are full of extravagant and unnatural Sentiments of Love.

Theſe

Theſe two pedantic Gentlemen made a great Noiſe in *Paris* about the tranſcendent Merit they aſcribed to *Marini*, and in a little time filled all *France* with his Name. Nor did *Marini*'s Preſence contradict their favourable Reports, he being by Nature endowed with an agreeable Perſon, pleaſing Manners, and an inſinuating Tone of Voice.

But a few Years after *Boileau* aſcending the Top of *Parnaſſus*, and looking ſeverely around, conceived Indignation and Diſdain againſt *Chapelain* and *Menage*. This ſolid and perſpicacious Man, although he did not underſtand *Italian*, would not give Faith to the loud Praiſes laviſhed by them on the Stranger; and perceiving in their *French* Poetry very little Taſte, he could not perſuade himſelf, as the reſt of *France* did, that they, who wrote ſo poorly in their own Language, could be able to judge of the

Performances of a Foreigner. It is probable then, that *Boileau* made ſome Part of the *Adone* be explained to him. This was an heroic Poem which *Marini* had printed for the firſt time in *Paris* with a tedious and cold *Preface* by *Chapelain*. The *French* Satiriſt had reaſon to confirm himſelf ſtill more in his Doubts of the Merit attributed to the *Italian*; and finding in this Poem an infinite Number of Puerilities, went further, and looked into ſome Part of the *Geruſalemme* of *Taſſo*, that then made alſo a great Noiſe in *Paris*; and in that he found likewiſe ſome Conceits. Beſides he had occaſion to give his Opinion on the *Tale of Giocondo* tranſlated into *French* by his Friend *La Fontaine*, and found in the Original of *Arioſto* a Pun.

This was enough to make the rigid Critic conclude, that the *Italian* Writings were all full of cold Puns, Conceits,

ceits, and Quibbles. He let looſe his Rage againſt them, and treated them with the greateſt Contempt, either becauſe he believed himſelf in the right, or through Hatred to *Chapelain* and *Menage*, who were laviſh in their Praiſes of us. *Boileau* did not obſerve that the *Pun*, in the *Tale of Giocondo*, was by *Arioſto* judiciouſly put into the Mouth of an *Inn-keeper*, who affected to be arch and facetious in recounting his Novel to *Rodomonte* his Gueſt; that Pun therefore is beautiful in its Place, being quite in the Character of an *Inn-keeper*.

Boileau grew furious, and his Fury ſo faſcinated his Judgment, that he could not perceive any tolerable Beauty either in *Arioſto*, *Taſſo*, or in any other *Italian* Poet. From hence his famous proverbial Verſes took their Riſe,

Laiſſons à l'Italie
De tout ce faux brillant l'éclatante folie —
Tout le clinquant du Taſſe à tout l'or de Virgile.

and

and all the other Abuſes he threw out againſt us.

It is an Obſervation made a long time ago, that the *French*, like Sheep, conſtantly follow him that happens to be their Leader. If one of their Princes of the Blood, or one of their great Generals advances towards the Enemy in Battel, the whole Army follows him couragiouſly. If their King puts on a Wig of a particular Faſhion, all the *French* will have Wigs *à la Royale*. If a Duke and Peer of the Kingdom wears an extravagant Colour; if a Man of great Dignity introduces a *Mode*, all the Nation conforms itſelf to his Taſte immediately.

They act in the ſame manner with regard to Letters; and this Genius of Imitation and Mimickry, peculiar to them above any other People preſent or paſt, drew all the *Criticks*, *Poets*, and *Writers* of every kind without

any

any Reſerve, into the Opinion of a Man ſo great as *Boileau* was; and all threw themſelves upon the *Italians* with this great Leader at the Head of the Army.

Thus our Language, which through Caprice and Faſhion, was in the Time of *Lewis* XIII. an Idol adored by the *French*, became, in the ſame manner, an Object of Ridicule and Contempt in the Beginning of the Reign of *Lewis* XIV.

Father *Bouhours*, a Jeſuit, who underſtood our Language as well as *Boileau*, and quoting the Verſes of *Bojardo* (after having lamed them with his bad Tranſlations) attributed them to *Arioſto*, wrote an elegant, but moſt impertinent *Dialogue* in *French* againſt the *Italians*. The undeſcerning Marquis *John Joſeph Orſi* gave himſelf the Trouble to anſwer him, and wrote againſt the Jeſuit a large Volume of

Reaſons

Reaſons, mixed with *Florentine* Invectives *, which *Bouhours* could not underſtand. The *Jeſuit Journaliſts of Trevoux* turned the pedantick bulky Apology of the Marquis into Ridicule without reading it; and to conclude, the Inchantment of *French Pride* operating upon *French* Ignorance was ſo ſtrong, that *Caprice* itſelf hath not yet had Force enough to break it.

Such was the *Riſe* and *Progreſs* of that ill-grounded Contempt the *French* have for the *Italians*, and the true Spring of all that cold Scurrility which Monſieur *De Voltaire*, when he was in *England* ſome Years ago, threw out in his *Eſſay* againſt us, and againſt a Language, and Works which he ought to have better ſtudied, and better underſtood than to judge of them with half-ſhut Eyes. His unjuſt Cenſures will diſhonour his Taſte and Diſcernment in the Opinion of

* Dialoguo *di Ciancione, e Bajone*, &c.

of Poſterity, notwithſtanding the many good Things he hath written in his own Language.

Since I have ſpoken ſo much of *Marini*, I will quote here a Paſſage of his *Adone*, to give a Specimen of that Character of his Poetry which I have endeavoured to exhibit. In the fourteenth Canto the Poet declames againſt an old Woman, who, with her mad Paſſion comes to interfere with the Love of a young Couple, and thus he inveighs againſt old Women in general.

O degli orti d'amor cani cuſtodi,
Vigilanti nel mal, garrule vecchie,
Fra i più leggiadri fior tenaci nodi,
Nel più ſoave mel pungenti pecchie!
Non ha tante la volpe inſidie, e frodi,
Tante luci il ſoſpetto, e tante orecchie
Quante per danno altrui ſempre n' ordite,
(Deh vi fulmini il ciel) quante n' aprite.

Delle

Delle menſe amoroſe arpie nocenti,
Al riposo mortal larve funeſte!
La vita è un prato, e voi ſiete i ſerpenti,
Voi ſol d' ogni piacer ſiete la peſte.
Senza turbini il cielo, e ſenza venti,
Senza procelle il mar, ſenza tempeſte
Quanto più lieto fora, e più giocondo,
E ſenza morte, e ſenza vecchie il mondo?

Furie crude e proterve, onde gli amanti
Van delle gioje lor vedovi ed orbi.
Fantaſmi vivi, e notomie ſpiranti,
Sepolcri aperti, ombre di morte, e morbi.
Perchè d' abbiſſo in fra gli eterni pianti,
Terra, omai non le chiudi, e non le aſſorbi?
L'invidia credo ſol dell' altrui bene
Le nutriſce, le move, e le ſoſtiene.

Thus literally engliſhed. "Ye Guardian Dogs of the Gardens of Love, "watchful in Evil, chattering old Women; Weeds clinging to the moſt "beautiful Flowers; ſtinging Bees in "the ſweeteſt Honey! The Fox hath

"not

" not ſo many Frauds and Wiles as
" ye invent, nor hath Suſpicion
" ſo many Eyes and Ears (Heaven
" blaſt ye all) as ye open for the Hurt
" of others. Noiſome Harpies at the
" Tables of Love; Hobgoblins fatal
" to the Repoſe of Men. Life is a
" Meadow, and ye are the Serpents.
" You only are the Bane of every
" Joy. If the Sky was without Whirl-
" winds and Hurricanes, the Sea with-
" out Tempeſts and Storms, and the
" Earth without Death and old Wo-
" men, how much more gay and
" pleaſing would the World be! Jea-
" lous and cruel Furies, who intirely
" deprive the Lovers of their Joys;
" living Phantoms; breathing Ana-
" tomies; open Sepulchres; Shades of
" Death; Diſeaſes. Why doſt thou
" not, O Earth, incloſe and ſwallow
" them in the Abyſs of eternal An-
" guiſh! Envy of the Good of others
" nouriſhes them, moves them, and
" ſupports them."

After

After this fine Preamble *Marini*, in the Perſon of one of his enamoured Heroes, thus continues the Panegyrick upon the old Woman who loved him.

Griſa, del buon villan l'empia mogliera,
Venne fra i noſtri amori ad interporſi.
Queſta malvagia intollerabil fera
Di me s' acceſe, ed io ben me n' accorſi,
Però che a tutte l'ore intorno m'era
Or con detti nojoſi, or con diſcorſi:
Ridea talora, e mi moſtrava il riſo
Voto di denti, e pien di creſpe il viſo.

Creſpa è la guancia, e dal viſaggio aſciutto
Si ſtaccan quaſi l'aride maſcelle.
Grinze ha le membra, e nel ſuo corpo tutto
Informata dall' oſſa appar la pelle.
Stan nel centro del capo orrido e brutto
Fitte degli occhi le profonde celle;
Occhi che biechi e lividi e ſanguigni
Avventano in altrui guardi maligni.

Le giunture ha ſnodate, e mal congiunte,
Adunco il naſo, che in ſul labbro pende;

Sporgon le ſecche coſte in fuor le punte;
Sgonfio ſulle ginocchia il ventre pende,
Ciaſcuna delle poppe arſicce e ſmunte
Sino al bellico il bottoncin diſtende;
Nella gola il gavocciolo, e nel mento
Porta la barba di filato argento.

Ha chiome irſute, iſpido ciglio e folto,
Bavoſe labbra, obliqua bocca, e groſſa;
Squallida fronte, e diſparuto volto,
E in ſomma altro non è ch'anima ed oſſa.
Sembra orrendo cadavere inſepolto
Che fuggito pur or ſia dalla foſſa;
Sembra mummia animata, e in tutto ſgombra
D'umana effigie, una palpabil ombra.

Thus alſo literally engliſhed. " *Grifa*, the impious Wife of the good " Countryman, came to interpoſe in " our Loves. This wicked intoler- " able wild Beaſt was enamoured of " me, which I perceived well, be- " cauſe ſhe was always about me, " now with irkſome Words, now " with Diſcourſes. She laughed now

" and

" and then, and her laughing ſhewed
" me a Face *empty* of Teeth, and
" *full* of Wrinkles. Wrinkled is
" her Cheek, and from her meagre
" Face her dry Jaws are almoſt fall-
" ing. Shrivel'd are her Limbs, and
" all over her Body the Skin ſhows
" the Form of her Bones. In the
" Center of the horrid and ugly Head
" ſtands fixed the deep Cells of her
" Eyes; Eyes that ſquint, livid, and
" bloody dart on every Body malignant
" Glances. Her Joints are looſe, and
" ill put together; her hooked Noſe
" hangs pendant over her Lips; her
" dry Ribs ſtick out their ſharp Points;
" the flabby Belly hangs over the
" Knees; both the ſun-burnt and
" ſkinny Teats extend their little
" Buttons to the Navel. She has a
" Wen in her Throat, and on her
" Chin a Beard of ſpun Silver; friz-
" zled Hair; harſh and buſhy Eye-
" brows; ſlabbering Lips; oblique
" and large Mouth; ſquallid Fore-

" head ; melancholy Face, and in
" fine ſhe is nothing but Life and
" Bones. She looks like a Corpſe
" uninterred, that is juſt eſcaped from
" the Grave ; ſhe looks like an ani-
" mated Mummy quite worn out of
" human Form, and a palpable Shade.

I know not whether in tranſlating it is more difficult to expreſs the Beauties or the Defects of the Original. But from the above quoted Verſes, I hope that the Reader, if he does not ſee all the Nonſenſe which is mixed with a little Wit in the Original, will at leaſt perceive by the Tranſlation that the Poet, with a fourth Part of the Colour which he hath uſed, might have drawn a Picture much more natural and perfect than he hath. But when his Imagination was fired, *Marini* had no means of quenching it ; and perhaps it happened to him as to a Perſon, who weary of keeping a ſlow, meaſured, and firm Pace in the deſ-

cending

cending a Declivity, when he begins to run, and to abandon himſelf to his own Weight, by the Force which the Hill gives to his running, precipitates himſelf to the Bottom, and whether he will or not goes beyond it.

Arioſto, who had an Imagination as fervent as *Marini*, but accompanied with Judgment, ſays, in the ſeventh Canto of *Orlando Furioſo*, that *Ruggiero* having received a Ring from *Meliſſa*, which would break the Force of Inchantments, accoſts the Sorcereſs *Alcina*, who, by her Magick, made herſelf appear beautiful in his Eyes, and

Ritrovà contra ogni ſua ſtima, invece
Della beltà, che dianzi avea laſciata,
Donna sì laida, che la terra tutta
Nè la più vecchia avea, nè la più brutta.

Pallido, e creſpo, e macilento avea
Alcina il viſo, il crin raro e canuto;

Sua ſtatura a ſei palmi non giungea;
Ogni dente di bocca era caduto;
Che più d'Ecuba, e più della Cumea,
Ed avea più d'ogn' altra mai vivuto.

That is. " He finds, contrary to " his Expectation, inſtead of the " Beauty he had juſt quitted, a Wo- " man ſo filthy, that the whole Earth " had not a Beldame ſo old and ſo " ugly. Pale and wrinkled, and flab- " by the Face of *Alcina* now appear- " ed. A few grey Hairs covered her " Head. Her Stature was ſcarce ſix " Hands in Heighth; the Teeth were " all fallen from her Jaws: She num- " bered more Years than *Hecuba*, and " the *Cumean* Sybil, or any other " Crone who ever lived.

Thus the great Maſters paint Few Strokes but natural and juſt.

This unneceſſary Exuberance of Words is one of the principal Faults of

of *Marini*, and this made him quickly loſe that great Name which he had too ſoon acquired; ſo that it is long ſince his Works have been read in our Country; and if his *Adone* had not been too ſolemnly prohibited by the Pope, I muſt be permitted to ſay, that this, as well as the other numberleſs Productions of his uncorrect and inelegant Pen would be buried in Oblivion.

But now I will ſelect one of our Epic Poets, who, hath been always read and admired amongſt us, and will endeavour as well as I am able to give the candid Reader an Idea of his Beauties, and ſhow that he deſerves neither that contemptuous Silence of Monſieur *de Voltaire* in his Eſſay, nor the inſolent Abuſe the *French Writers* laviſh in general on us. The Poet of whom I am going to ſpeak is DANTE; among the *Italians* called, *il Padre della Lingua, e Poeſia Toſcana*,

cana, "The Father of *Tuscan* Lan-
"guage and Poetry."

All the Face of *Europe* was ſtill overſpread with *Gothic* Barbariſm when the Inhabitants of *Florence* bought their Liberty of the Northern Emperors with Sums of Gold.

As ſoon as their Republick was ſettled, they turned their Minds to the Cultivation of Arts and Letters; aſſiſting themſelves with that little Learning that was then creeping among the *Sicilians* and *Provencials*, which conſiſted in a few Notions of Laws, and Poetry.

Accurſio and *Brunetto Latini* early among their Citizens gave the firſt Blow to Ignorance. The *Muſes* began to free themſelves from their ruſty Shackles in the Schools of theſe two Men. Many other *Florentines* putting their helping Hand to the Work, brightened

brightened a little the Face of Reaſon; but *Dante* appeared *, and like a Morning-Sun, almoſt diſperſed the Miſts that hovered for ſo many Ages over the *Parnaſſean* Mountain.

This Man was of a very noble and rich Family of *Florence*, called *Alighieri*. He was of an haughty and inflexible Diſpoſition, and obtained very early, both in the Field and in the Magiſtracy, the moſt eminent Poſts of the new Commonwealth, which in his Time was engaged in a War againſt moſt of its Neighbours †.

He was, while yet a Youth, one of the principal Leaders of the *Florentine* Troops, and not contented with commanding them, he expoſed himſelf bravely in all Encounters with the Enemies like a common Soldier, and with his own Hand killed many of their

* *Dante* was born in *Florence* in the Year 1340. 1265

† See *Macchiavelli*'s Hiſtory of *Florence*.

their Men. But seeing himself endowed with all the Literature of his Time, as well sacred as profane, very well skilled in *Latin*, *Greek*, and *Hebrew*; having Capacity enough to be Leader of his Countrymen, and a supreme Degree of Courage accompanied by uncommon Strength and Agility of Body, he not only despised his Fellow-Citizens, and the most venerable Members of the Republick, but made little Account of any of his Contemporaries.

He one Day in the Counsel (so the *Florentines* then called their Senate) gave a too lively Proof of his frequently expressed Contempt for others, and high Opinion of himself. It being debated amongst them whom they should send Embassador to *Rome* on a very important Occasion, the Senators proposed *Dante* for that Employment. *E s'io vado, chi resta?* "And if I go, who stays?" said he. Then stay, answered

answered they. *E s'io sto, chi va?* "And if I stay, who goes?" replied the Poet.

This insolent and contemptuous Behaviour soon alienated the Affection of his Countrymen from him, and, although they acknowledged that his Merit was superior to many others, they hated, and persecuted him, and at last banished him their Territories.

Dante was obliged to fly and retire to *Ravenna*, where he was kindly received and entertained by the Counts *Polenta*'s Lords of that City. There it was that he wrote many Things in *Latin*; but not intirely satisfied with his Performances in that Language, he undertook to write an Epic Poem in his own, which was at that time called in *Italy*, *Lingua Volgare*, "Vulgar Tongue."

The

The Argument that he choſe was well adapted to his own Nature, and gave him an Opportunity of venting all that Rancour and Rage that boiled in his Boſom, and devoured him in his Exile. *Hell*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradiſe* were his Theme; ſo he had the Conveniency of throwing into the profoundeſt Parts of Hell many of his Fellow-Citizens, againſt whom he was enraged, as alſo many other Perſons Antient or Contemporaries whom he diſliked. Emperors, Kings, Popes, Cardinals, Noblemen, and Plebeyans, his vehement Pen reſpected none. Nay, having received ſome Diſpleaſure from the Lords *Polenta*'s his Protectors and Benefactors, he plunged two of them as Adulterers in the Manſion of the Damned, and thus caſt an indelible Blemiſh on the Honour of an illuſtrious Family, to which he had been obliged for his Safety, and for a quiet and ſplendid Retreat: And what is more remarkable (but for what reaſon is unknown)

unknown) he immerged in Hell, and in the moſt infamous Part of it, *Brunetto Latini* who had been his Preceptor, and inſtructed him in his tender Years with more than paternal Affection.

Thoſe who found Grace, were only confined in Purgatory, which, according to our Catholic Notions, is a Place of Redemption, and thoſe that are fortunate enough to be ſent there, are certain of arriving, ſoon or late, at Celeſtial Glory. But it is remarkable, that *Dante* took the Liberty to depart from the general Belief of the Church in which he was born and educated, ſince the firſt Perſon he meets in Purgatory is a Pagan, *Cato of Utica.*

In the third and laſt Part of his Poem, in which he paints Paradiſe, he exalts all his Friends, and all the famous Men and great Writers of Chriſtian Antiquity his Favourites; but

above

above all them one *Beatrix*, the Lady he was in love with, who he feigns to be his *Guide* from one Circle of Glory to another.

If I was desirous of finding some Resemblance between *Homer* and *Dante*, I might say, that his Poem is an Imitation of the *Odyssey*, since it is only the Travels of a Person over Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, as the Odyssey is the Travel of *Ulysses* through many Seas and Lands poetically described. But this Resemblance, which has been carried very far by some *Italians*, hath always seemed to me very much strained. So I will content myself with only extracting some Passages from this *Tuscan* Poet to give an Idea of his poetical Genius without drawing, by vain Ostentation of Erudition, any Parallel between him and the *Greek*.

The Principal Hero in the Poem is *Dante* himself, if the *Shade of Virgil* (who

(who acts the ſame Part for him as *Mentor* does for *Telemachus*) may not diſpute the firſt Place.

He begins his Poem with relating, that in the Strength of his Age he found himſelf in a horrid Foreſt among terrible Wild-Beaſts, who, ſeeing him, came forward with open Mouths to devour him: To avoid them he fled over a deſart Plain: There he met the Shade of *Virgil*, who conducted him to the Gate of *Tartarus*, over which theſe tremendous Words were written.

Per me ſi va nella cittá dolente:
Per me ſi va nell' eterno dolore:
Per me ſi va tra la perduta gente.

Giuſtizia moſſe il mio alto fattore;
Fecemi la divina poteſtate,
La ſomma ſapienza, e'l primo amore.

Dinanzi a Me non fur coſe create
Se non eterne, ed io eterno duro.
Laſſate ogni ſperanza o voi che entrate.

Thus engliſhed, " Through Me " lies the Way to the doleful City. " Through Me lies the Way to ever- " laſting Woe. Through Me lies the " Way to thoſe doomed to Perdition. " Eternal Juſtice, omnipotent Power, " conſummate Wiſdom, and all-creat- " ing Love moved the Almighty to " make Me. Me, except his Angels, " the eldeſt of created Things. I am " to all Eternity. Ye who enter " here, quit Hope for ever."

Not far from the infernal Gate he comes to a Place where the Souls of indolent and ſlothful People are impriſoned, together with thoſe Angels who kept themſelves neutral in the War between the Omnipotent and his rebel Angels.

Quivi

Quivi ſoſpiri, pianti, ed alti guai
Riſonavan per l'aer ſenza ſtelle.
- - - - - - - - - - -

Diverſe lingue, orribili favelle,
Parole di dolore, accenti d'ira,
Voci alte, e fioche, e ſuon di man con elle,

Facevano un tumulto, il qual s'aggira
Sempre in quell' aria ſenza tempo tinta,
Come la rena quando il turbo ſpira.
- - - - - - - - - - - -

Queſti non hanno ſperanza di morte,
E la lor cieca vita è tanto baſſa,
Che invidioſi ſon d' ogn' altra ſorte.

Fama di loro il mondo eſſer non laſſa;
Miſericordia, e giuſtizia li ſdegna.
Non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda, e paſſa.

" There Sighs, and Tears, and
" loud-reſounding Woes filled the
" dark Air unbleſt with even a Star.

" There different Languages all horrid
" and confuſed, complaining Words,
" Accents of Rage, loud Screeks, and
" whiſpered Anguiſh, heightened with
" claſhing Hands, form a harſh Tu-
" mult in the ever-darkened Air. Such
" is the Sound as when a Whirl-
" wind's furious Blaſt drives the looſe
" Sands in Clouds of whirling Duſt.
" Thoſe have no Hope of Death, and
" their dull Lives are ſpent in ſuch a
" ſhameful Obſcurity, that every other
" Fate they wiſh and envy. Loſt in
" Oblivion, their whole Lives are
" Blanks. Eternal Mercy and Juſtice
" diſdain them. Let us not ſpeak of
" them, but look and paſs."

From thence *Dante* and *Virgil* come to the infernal River, on the other Side of which are the dreary Habitations of the Wicked. On the Shore of the fatal Flood ſtands innumerable Souls waiting to be wafted to the oppoſite Side.

——*Quell'*

——Quell' anime, ch'eran laſſe, e nude,
Cangiar colore, e dibattero i denti.
- - - - - - - - - - - -
Beſtemmiavano Dio, e' lor parenti,
L'umana ſpecie, il luogo, il tempo, il ſeme
Di lor Semenza, e di lor naſcimenti.
Poi ſi ritraſſer tutte quante inſieme
Forte piangendo alla riva malvagia
Che attende ciaſcun Uom, che Dio non teme.

" Thoſe ſhivering Souls moved
" ſlowly on. Pale were their Looks,
" and their trembling Teeth claſhed
" againſt each other — Blaſpheming
" God, execrating their Parents, their
" Country, their Fore-fathers, the
" Hour of their Birth, and the whole
" human Race. Then cluſtering all
" in Crowds with horrid yells, they
" reach the curſed Shore, to which
" every Mortal is doomed who fears
" not God."

Virgil and *Dante* paſs the River alſo, and enter the infernal Regions, in the Deſcription of which the Poet exerts a wonderful Imagination. He divides Hell into many Places of Puniſhment, each of which contains a diſtinct Claſs of Sinners and Tranſgreſſors of the Laws of God. But his uſual uncatholic Vein tranſports him into a Corner of it, where there is a Place deſigned for the Souls of the antient Sages, and Pagan Heroes who were virtuous and pious when in the World. The Place, although it is in Hell, is nevertheleſs moſt delightful; and there he finds that *Brutus*, who delivered *Rome* from the Tyranny of the *Tarquins*, with *Socrates*, *Plato*, *Anaxagoras*, *Thales*, *Hipocrates*, *Tully*, *Lavinia*, *Lucretia*, *Portia*, and many other antient Men and Women, who dwell there in Happineſs.

The

The *Epiſodes* of the Poem in this Part called Hell, are made up of ſeveral Stories related by the Damned, one of which I will tranſcribe.

Dante meets with a *Florentine* Count, named *Ugolino*, who is furiouſly gnawing the Scull of a human Body. He asks him the Cauſe of his canine Rage, and

La bocca ſollevò dal fero paſto
Quel peccator, forbendola a' capelli
Del capo ch' egli avea diretro guaſto.

Poi cominciò: tu vuoi ch' io rinnovelli
Diſperato dolor, che 'l cor mi preme
Già pur penſando pria ch' io ne favelli.

Ma ſe le mie parole eſſer den ſeme,
Che frutti infamia al traditor ch' io rodo,
Parlare, e lagrimar vedraimi inſieme.

- - - - - - - - -

Tu dei ſaper ch'i' fu' 'l Conte Ugolino,
E queſti è l'Arciveſcovo Ruggieri;
Or ti dirò perch' io ſon tal vicino.

Che per l'effetto de' ſuo' ma' penſieri
Fidandomi di lui io foſſi preſo,
E poſcia morto, dir non é meſtieri.

Però quel che non puoi averne inteſo,
Cioè la morte mia come fu cruda
Udirai, e ſaprai s'e'm' ha offeſo.

Thus engliſhed. " Then the fell " Wretch, taking his Mouth from the " horrible repaſt, and wiping it with " the Hairs of that Head, that with " his Teeth he had all craſhed behind, " began. Muſt I then renew my " black Deſpair, and ſpeak what " tears my Heart but in Reflection " only? Yet, if my Words will fix " eternal Infamy on the Memory of " the Villain, whoſe Head I am " gnawing thus, I ſhall ſpeak and

" weep

" weep at once.—Know then, that I
" am the Count *Ugolino*, and this
" Scull that thou beholdeſt, was once
" the Archbiſhop *Ruggieri*'s. Thou
" ſhalt judge if I have not reaſon for
" this fell Revenge. It is not neceſ-
" ſary to tell thee in what manner he
" betrayed me even in the time that I
" placed the greateſt Confidence in
" him. I will unfold only that which
" thou canſt not know from others;
" the horrid Cruelty by which he
" made me periſh."

The *Count* then ſuccintly relates when, and in what manner he was caſt into a horrible Dungeon with his four Sons by the above-mentioned *Archbiſhop*, and thus goes on.

Quand' io fui deſto innanzi la dimane
Pianger ſenti' fra 'l ſonno i miei figliuoli
Ch'eran con meco, e domandar del pane.

Ben

Ben sè crudel se tu già non ti duoli
Pensando ciò che al cor mi s'annunziava!
E se non piangi, di che pianger suoli!

Già eram desti, e l'ora s'appressava
Che 'l cibo ne doveva esser addotto,
E per sù sogno ciascun dubitava.

Ed i' sentì chiavar l'uscio di sotto
All' orribile torre, ond' io guardai
Nel viso a' mie' figliuo' senza far motto.

I' non piangeva, sì dentro impetrai:
Piangevan Elli; ed Anselmuccio mio
Disse: Tu guardi sì, padre: Che hai?

Però non lagrimai, nè rispos' io
Tutto quel giorno, nè la notte appresso
Insin che l' altro Sol nel mondo uscìo.

Come un poco di raggio si fu messo
Pel doloroso carcere, ed io scorsi
Per quattro visi lo mio aspetto istesso,

Ambo

Ambo le mani per dolor mi morſi:
E quei credendo ch'i' 'l feſſi per voglia
Di manicar, di ſubito levorſi;

E diſſer: Padre, aſſai ci fia men doglia
Se tu mangi di noi! Tu ne veſtiſti
Queſte miſere carni, e tu le ſpoglia!

Quetaimi allor per non farli più triſti:
Quel dì, e l' altro ſtemmo tutti muti:
Ahi dura terra, perchè non t' apriſti!

Poſcia che fummo al quarto dì venuti
Gaddo mi ſi gittò diſteſo a' piedi,
Dicendo: Padre mio, che non m'ajuti!

Quivi morì. E come tu mi vedi
Vid' io caſcar li tre ad uno ad uno
Tra 'l quinto dì, e 'l ſeſto; ond' io mi diedi

Già cieco a brancolar ſopra ciaſcuno,
E tre dì li chiamai poichè fur morti:
Poſcia più che 'l dolor potè 'l digiuno.

Quand'

Quand' ebbe detto ciò con gli occhi torti,
Ripreſe il teſchio miſero co' denti,
Che furo all' oſſo come d'un can forti.

Thus engliſhed. " The next Day,
" when it was yet ſcarce light, I
" heard my Children weeping before
" their Sleep was well diſſipated.
" They were in the ſame Place with
" me, and deſired me to give them
" Bread. Ah, if thou weepeſt not at
" the Reflection of what I felt that
" cruel Moment, thy Heart muſt be
" Proof to every Sentiment of Com-
" paſſion. After having paſt the
" Night in wild tormenting Dreams
" we all awaked. The Hour ap-
" proached when we expected to have
" ſomething brought to us to eat.
" But inſtead of ſeeing any Food ap-
" pear, I heard the Doors of that
" horrible Dungeon more cloſely bar-
" red. I beheld my little Children
" in Silence, and could not weep.

" My

" My Heart was petrified. The little
" Wretches wept, and my dear *An-*
" *ſelm* ſaid: Father, you look on us!
" What ails you! I could neither
" weep nor anſwer, and continued
" ſwallowed up in ſilent Agony all
" that Day and the following Night,
" even till the Dawn of Day. As
" ſoon as a glimmering Ray darted
" through the doleful Priſon, that I
" could view again thoſe four Faces,
" in which my own Image was im-
" preſt, I gnawed my Fiſt with Rage,
" and Grief. My Children believ-
" ing I did thus through Eagerneſs to
" eat, raiſing themſelves up, ſaid to
" me. Dear Father! our Torments
" would be leſs, if you would allay
" the Rage of your Hunger upon us.
" It is you who have clothed us with
" this miſerable Fleſh; now then,
" diveſt us of it! I reſtrained myſelf
" that I might not increaſe their
" Miſery. We were mute that Day
" and the following. Ah cruel Earth,

" why

" why did'ſt thou not ſwallow us at
" at once! The fourth Day being
" come, *Gaddo* falling extended at
" my Feet, cried: My Father, why
" do not you help me! and died.
" The other three expired one after
" the other between the fifth and ſixth
" Days, famiſhed as thou ſeeſt me
" now. And I, being ſeized with
" Blindneſs, began to go groping up-
" on them with my Hands and Feet.
" I continued calling them by their
" Names during three Days after they
" were dead. Then Hunger vanquiſh-
" ed my Grief!—Saying this, with
" Eyes all fierce and wild, he took
" again that deteſted Scull between
" his Teeth, craſhing it as a hungry
" Maſtiff does his Prey."

The Poet rap'd as in an enthuſiaſtic Fit of Rage by the horrible Relation of *Ugolino*, cloſeth this Story with this moſt heavy Malediction on the City of *Piſa*,

Piſa, of which the barbarous *Ruggieri* was Archbiſhop.

Ahi Piſa, vituperio delle genti
Bel bel paeſe là, dove il sì ſona!
Poich' e' vicini a te punir ſon lenti,

Movanſi la Capraja, e la Gorgona,
E faccian ſiepe ad Arno in ſulla foce,
Si ch' egli annieghi in te ogni perſona.

Thus engliſhed. " Ah *Piſa*, Diſ-
" grace of the bleſt *Italian* Land!
" ſince thy Neighbours are ſlow in
" puniſhing thee, Oh may *Capraja*
" and *Gorgona* * move from their
" Foundations, and blocking up the
" River *Arno*, force back its Streams
" to overwhelm the curſed Race in
" thee!

I have cited theſe few Paſſages of *Dante*, not only to give the *Engliſh* Reader,

* *Capraja* and *Gorgona* are two little Iſlands at the Mouth of the River *Arno*, near which *Piſa* is ſituated.

Reader, who is not acquainted with him in the Original, ſome Idea of his Poetry; but alſo to ſhew him that the *Italian* is falſly accuſed of effeminacy by Mr. *Voltaire*, or rather by thoſe from whom he has humbly copied this Opinion. The Verſes I have tranſcribed are ſo little effeminate, that every one who hears them read by a Perſon who gives them their proper Emphaſis, although they do not underſtand them, will be convinced by the Sound, that they are as ſtrong and ſonorous as thoſe in any other Language. And if the Reader would have a ſtill greater Proof of the Strength of our Tongue, he needs only read the thirty-three firſt Lines of the ſixth Canto of that Poem, which I do not quote, to avoid too great Length, or rather, becauſe I believe it is impoſſible to tranſlate them with Energy equal to the Original.

To

To ſum up all I have to ſay on this Head, the Thirty-four Cantos of *Dante*'s *Hell* are wrote with more virility of Thought and Vigour of Stile than any other Poem antient or modern; and in this Particular no Nation has produced its Equal, except the *Paradiſe Loſt* of *Milton*. The moſt nervous Scenes of the *Great Corneilie* himſelf (a Poet the leaſt effeminate among the *French*) do not come near the Strength of *Dante*.

I ſhall not dwell long on thoſe two Parts of the Poem, called *Purgatory*, and *Paradiſe*; but only ſay, that the Thoughts and Stile of *Purgatory* have neither too much Strength, nor too much Softneſs. It is one continued Picture of ſupportable Grief; and ſupportable, becauſe it is mixed with Hope, according to the Idea the *Catholics* have of that Place. But there is no Poet

in *Italy* (deſervedly called the Mother of ſweet Poets) ſo ſweet, ſo harmonious, and ſo affecting as *Dante* in his Deſcription of *Paradiſe*. Nor is this a *French* Exaggeration for which any Allowance is to be made: It is a certain Truth, that *Petrarca* himſelf, in the moſt pathetic Deſcriptions of his Paſſion for the beautiful *Laura*, does not equal the Sweetneſs of the *Hymns* which *Dante* makes the Angels and bleſſed Spirits ſing in the third Part of his Poem. All the Images, all the Compariſons, all the Deſcriptions of this Part are as they ought to be; that is to ſay, the very reverſe of thoſe of his *Hell*, as his *Purgatory* judiciouſly partakes of both.

I ſhall not quote any of the Lines to prove the Truth of what I ſay, becauſe I do not think it poſſible to give them the ſame Sweetneſs in a Tranſ-

Tranſlation as they have in the Original. All the World allows, that the Muſic of our Syllables cannot be tranſuſed into another Language. But there have been ſo many Editions of this Poem in *Italy* and in other Countries, that it is not difficult to find it; and every Stranger may eaſily convince himſelf of what I ſay, by reading it himſelf, or if he does not underſtand *Italian*, making it only be read to him.

However, I will not neglect to take notice of two remarkable Paſſages of this antient Poet, for the ſake of a Relation they have to the modern Syſtem of Aſtronomy.

One of theſe Paſſages is in the firſt Canto of the *Purgatory*, to illuſtrate which, I ſhall tranſcribe Part of a Letter written from *Spain* in the Year 1500, by the famous *Amerigo Veſ-*

pucci of *Florence* to *Lorenzo di Pierfranceſco de' Medici* after his Return from the Countries he had diſcovered, which were called *America* from his Name. Theſe are *Veſpucci*'s Words.

Tanto navigammo per la Torrida Zona alla parte d' Auſtro, che ci trovammo iſtar di baſſo della Linea Equinoziale, e tener l' un Polo, e l' altro al fin del noſtro Orizzonte; e la paſſammo di ſei gradi, e del tutto perdemmo la Stella Tramontana, che appena ci ſi moſtravano le Stelle dell' Orſa minore — E come deſideroſo d' eſſere Autore che ſegnaſſi la Stella del Firmamento dell' altro Polo, perdei molte volte il ſonno la notte in contemplare il movimento delle Stelle dell' altro Polo per ſegnar quale di eſſe teneſſi minor movimento; e non potetti con quante male notti ebbi; e con quanti ſtrumenti uſai, che fu 'l quadrante, e l' aſtrolabio. Non ſegnai Stella che teneſſe

men di dieci gradi di movimento all' intorno del Firmamento, di modo che non restai soddisfatto in me medesimo di nominar nessuna. — E mentre in questo andavo, mi ricordai d' un detto del nostro Poeta Dante, del quale fa menzione nel primo Capitolo del Purgatorio, quando finge di salire di questo Emisferio, e trovarsi nell' altro; che, volendo descrivere il Polo antartico, dice:

Io mi volsi a man destra, e posi mente
All' altro Polo, e vidi quattro Stelle
Non viste mai fuor ch' alla prima gente.

Goder pareva il Ciel di lor fiammelle:
Oh settentrional vedovo sito
Poichè privato sè di mirar quelle!

Che secondo me mi pare che il Poeta in questi versi voglia descrivere per le quattro Stelle il Polo dell' altro Firmamento; e non mi diffido fino a quì, che

quello ch' è dica non ſalga verità, perchè io notai quattro Stelle figurate come una Mandorla, che tenevano poco movimento. E ſe Dio mi da vita e ſalute ſpero preſto tornare in quello Emiſferio, e non tornare ſenza notare il Pola.

In engliſh thus. " We ſailed ſo " far under the Torrid Zone towards " the Eaſt, that we found ourſelves " under the Equinoxial Line, having " both the Poles at the Extremities of " our Horizon. We paſſed the Line " ſix Degrees, and quite loſt the " North-ſtar. We could ſcarcely per- " ceive the Stars of the leſſer Bear. " Deſirous to be the Diſcoverer and " Namer of the Pole-ſtar in the other " Hemiſphere, I loſt many times my " Sleep in contemplating the Stars in " the oppoſite Pole, to diſcover which " of them had leaſt Motion. Yet, " notwithſtanding the troubleſome " Nights I had, and the Inſtruments

" I uſed,

" I uſed, that is to ſay the Quadrant
" and the Aſtrolabe, I could not per-
" ceive any Star that had leſs than
" ten Degrees of Motion. So that I
" had not the Satisfaction of naming
" any one. While I was buſying my-
" ſelf in theſe Obſervations, I remem-
" bered a Paſſage in our Poet *Dante*
" in the firſt Canto of *Purgatory*,
" when feigning to aſcend from this
" Hemiſphere, he finds himſelf in the
" other, and deſcribing the Anthartic
" Pole, ſays,

" I turned to the Right-hand,
" and fixed my Eyes on the other
" Pole, where I ſaw four Stars that
" no Perſon had ever ſeen but our
" firſt Parents. The Sky ſmiled
" with their Luſtre. Oh! unhap-
" py North that art deprived of
" beholding them!

" In my Judgment, the Poet in
" theſe Verſes intends by the *four*
" *Stars* to deſcribe the Pole of the
" other Firmament. And I do not
" deſpair but *Dante*'s Opinion will be
" found to be true, becauſe I obſerved
" *four Stars* in the Form of an Al-
" mond, that had but little Motion.
" And if God gives me Life and
" Health I hope to return to that
" Hemiſphere, and not come back
" without marking out the Pole."

Although *Dante*, as appears by his Poem, knew as much of Aſtronomy as it was poſſible to know before the Appearance of *Galileo* and *Newton*, nevertheleſs I cannot help thinking it ſtrange, that he ſhould have any Certainty of the Conſtellation of the oppoſite Pole, at a time when we had but ſlight Notions either of the *circular*, or of the *oblate* Figure of this

this Globe, and were not quite ſure in our Hemiſphere of the Exiſtence of an oppoſite one. But it is not without ſome reaſon that *Lorenzo Giacomini*, a learned *Tuſcan*, in a *Diſſertation* upon *Poetical Fury*, wondered that *Dante*, by mere Force of Enthuſiaſm, ſhould have thus hit upon a Truth ſo remote from the Knowledge of his Time, as he has done in the above-quoted Verſes, that afforded Matter for Speculation to ſo great and ſingular a Man as *Veſpucci*.

The other Paſſage is the following, in the 28th Canto of *Paradiſe*, where after having poetically ſaid, that *the Globes form a Circle round the Throne of the Divinity, and are moved and ruled by the Dominations, Virtues, Principalities, Powers, Archangels and Angels divided into ſeveral Hyerarchies according to their Degrees of Dignity*, he adds,

Queſt Ordini di sù tutti rimirano,
E di giù vincon sì, che verſo Dio
Tutti tirati ſono, e tutti tirano.

Thus engliſhed. " Theſe Globes " arranged in order divinely wonder- " ful, all tend upwards by Attrac- " tion, and downward by their Gra- " vity. They at once attract and are " attracted towards God, the everlaſt- " ing Sun."

The Abbot *Tagliazucchi*, a great Mathematician, and Profeſſor of the *Greek* and *Tuſcan* Languages in the Univerſity of *Turin*, who died two Years ago, and of whom I had the good Fortune to be many Years a Pupil, endeavoured to prove in a *Diſſertation* that he wrote on *the Manner of educating Youth in the Belle-Letters*, that in this Triplet of *Dante* are clearly expreſſed Sir *Iſaac Newton*'s Notions

Notions of *Attraction*. I will leave the *Engliſh* Reader to judge if my honoured Preceptor was in the right in his Aſſertion.

If *Dante* is wonderful in painting the Paſſions, and making lively Repreſentations of Objects, as in my Opinion may be plainly ſeen by the above-quoted Paſſages of his *Inferno*, he is ſtill more ſo in the Juſtneſs of his Similies, which are the Nerves and Soul of Poetry. There no Poet is ſuperior, or even equal to him.

Another of his peculiar Beauties I muſt take notice of; and that is, his having interſperſed in his Poem ſeveral Words, Phraſes, and whole Lines and Triplets in pure *Latin*. This he hath done with infinite Grace and Judgment, which might perhaps appear ridiculous in any other of the living Languages; but in *Italian*, and par-

ticular

ticularly in *Dante*'s Poem it has a beautiful Effect, and adds great Force and Dignity to his Stile, not only because *Dante* knew well how to ſelect thoſe *Latin* Words and Phraſes which have a Similitude of Sound with the *Tuſcan*, but alſo becauſe no other of the living Languages hath ſo much Affinity with the *Latin* Tongue as ours hath. And it is obſervable alſo, that what *Latin* he hath ſpread through his Poem, is all taken from the Sacred Writings, in the Stile of which he hath always endeavoured to write.

I will not pretend to ſay that *Dante* has no Defects. He is juſtly taxed with Meanneſs of Stile in ſome few Places, and blamed with having made a Medley of Names and Fables of the Heathen Mithology, with the Names and Stories moſt venerable and holy of the *Chriſtian* Religion. But this Fault may be extenuated if we reflect,

that

that he wrote in a Time when they had no other Models of good Poetry but the Works of the *Pagans*, with which he was ſo well acquainted, that he could not avoid to fill his Fancy with their Thoughts and Phraſes. That Spirit of Method and Geometry that hath taken Poſſeſſion, for more than an Age, of the Poetry of the principal *European* Nations, hath been the Conſequence of rigid Obſervation and exact Criticiſm; and could not be found in the Time of *Dante*, as he was the *firſt* great Poet and great Writer. Before him *Italy* had not produced a Man worthy of Immortality by Works of Genius after the Fall of the Empire of our Predeceſſors.

To theſe Poetic Faults of *Dante* may be added a Moral One; that is, the having ridiculed and ſatirized, with as much Bitterneſs as *Luther* himſelf, the Prieſts and Friars, and generally

generally all the Supporters of the Church in which he lived. Too many of our Poets who came after him followed his imprudent and dangerous Example.

Voltaire, in his *Eſſay*, ſpeaking of the *Paradiſe Loſt*, ſays, that "*Milton*, "as he was travelling through *Italy* "in his Youth, ſaw at *Florence* a Co- "medy called *Adamo*, writ by one "*Andreino* a Player, and dedicated "to *Mary de Medicis*, Queen of "*France*. The Subject of the Play "was *the Fall of Man*; the Actors "God, the Devils, the Angels, Adam, "Eve, the Serpent, Death, and the "ſeven mortal Sins. That Topic ſo "improper for a *Drama* (continues "*Voltaire*) but ſo ſuitable to the ab- "ſurd Genius of the *Italian* Stage, "as it was at that time, was handled "in a manner intirely comformable to "the Extravagance of the Deſign.

"The

" The Scene opens with a Chorus of
" Angels, and a Cherubin thus ſpeaks
" for the reſt. *Let the Rain-bow be*
" *the Fiddle-ſtick of the Fiddle of the*
" *Heavens; let the Planets be the*
" *Notes of our Muſick; let Time beat*
" *carefully the Meaſure, and the*
" *Winds make the Sharps*, &c. Thus
" the Play begins, and every Scene
" riſes above the firſt in Profuſion
" of Impertinence. *Milton* pierced
" through the Abſurdity of that Per-
" formance to the hidden Majeſty of
" the Subject, which being altogether
" unfit for the Stage, yet might be
" for the Genius of *Milton*, and for
" his only, the Foundation of an
" Epic Poem. He took from that
" ridiculous Trifle the firſt Hint of
" the nobleſt Work which human
" Imagination hath ever attempted,
" and which he executed more than
" twenty Years after."

I know

I know not upon what Foundation it is, that *Voltaire* aſſures us, that the Taſte of the *Italian* Stage *in the Time of Milton*, was ſo bad as to reliſh the Comedy he mentions. If he had read the Life, or even the Writings of *Milton* himſelf, he would have perceived by them that *Florence, when that Poet travelled through Italy*, was full of learned Men; and if he had the leaſt Notion of the *Florentine* People, he would have ſpoke with leſs Contempt of them. But ſetting this aſide, how can he ſo poſitively affirm that *Milton* took the *firſt Hint* of *Paradiſe Loſt* from the above-mentioned abſurd Comedy of *Andreino*? I have ſome Doubts of his Veracity, and really ſuſpect the Exiſtence of the Play and its Author. Yet, to drop this extravagant Anecdote, ſuffer me to ſay, that to me it ſeems ridiculous, that ſuch a Man as *Milton* could have raked

raked among the Rubbiſh of *Andreino* (if ſuch a Man ever exiſted) ſo bright a Jewel as the *Paradiſe Loſt*. *Milton* underſtood the *Italian* Authors ſo well, and was ſo fond of *Dante* in particular, that he wrote ſome *Italian* Verſes (yet extant) in the Stile of that Epic Poet: A thing not only extremely difficult for a Foreigner, but alſo for an *Italian*, ſince to underſtand *Dante* perfectly we are obliged to ſtudy him in the Schools and Univerſities with almoſt as much Labour as we do *Virgil*. If then *Milton* was ſo much Maſter of *Dante*'s Stile that he could write Verſes in his manner, and if the Thoughts and Images of both the Poems have a great Reſemblance to each other, as the Reader may ſee by the Quotations I have given; if the very Subjects and Titles are alike, is it not more reaſonable and probable to ſay, that *Milton* took the *firſt Hint* of his *Paradiſe Loſt* from a noble and

famous Epic Poet, than from a mean ridiculous Comedian?

Let not the Reader wonder, if, with ſo little Ceremony, I call in queſtion the Veracity of Mr. *Voltaire*, ſince I ſee by his wrong Deciſions concerning the *Italians* in his Eſſay, and in his other Writings, that he does not underſtand our Language, and that he has a particular Hatred to us, never loſing any Occaſion to tear us with contemptuous Jeſts, giving falſe Characters of our moſt celebrated Writers, tranſlating unfaithfully ſome Paſſages from their Works, and inventing Falſhoods to make his Readers laugh at our Expence.

Among other Deviations from Truth, in the *Eſſay* he ſays, that "*Taſſo* ſends *Ubaldo* and his *Compa-*
"*nion* to an old *Holy Conjurer*, who
"carries them juſt into the Center

"of

" of the Earth. The two Knights " walk there on the Banks of a Ri- " vulet covered with precious Stones " of all kinds. From that Place they " are ſent to *Aſcalon* to an *old Woman* " who carries them ſwiftly in a little " Ship to the *Canary* Iſlands.

This cold Merriment of our poor Critick is a falſe Tranſlation of what *Taſſo* ſays in a moſt noble Strain. *Savio Mago* is vilely tranſlated into *Engliſh*, *Holy Conjurer*. But let us ſee *Taſſo*'s Deſcription of the *old Woman of Aſcalon*. CANTO XV. Stanza iii and iv.

Vider picciola Nave, e in poppa a quella,
Che guidar la dovea, fatal Donzella.

Crinita fronte Ella dimoſtra, e ciglia
Corteſi, e favorevoli, e tranquille;
E nel ſembiante agli Angioli ſomiglia,
Tanta Luce ivi par ch' arda e ſfaville.

In engliſh thus. " *Ubaldo* and his " *Companion* ſpyed a little Bark, and " ſeated in the Stern a Maid ordained " to guide it. Her Hair hung in looſe " Curls upon her Forehead. A ſoft " Complacency ſparkled in her Eyes. " The ſhining Luſtre of her Face ex- " preſſed angelic Beauty.

This is the *old Woman of Aſcalon* that Monſieur *de Voltaire* takes notice of.

If I thought it neceſſary, I could quote many other Paſſages from his Writings to prove his Ignorance of our Poets, and his Malice againſt their Reputation. But not to trouble the Reader with a long and tedious Examination of that contemptible Pamphlet ſo pompouſly intitled, *An Eſſay upon the Epic Poetry of the European Nations from Homer down to Milton*, I will

I will only refer him to another of his Impoſtures which relates to a *Portugueſe* Author.

He endeavours to impoſe upon his *Engliſh* Reader by tranſlating falſly ſome Lines of *Camoens*, a *Portugueſe* Poet, in order to create a Reſemblance between them and a celebrated Paſſage of Sir *John Denham*. Theſe are Mr. *Voltaire*'s Words. " *Camoens*'s Poem, " in my Opinion, is full of number- " leſs Faults and Beauties, thick ſown " near one another; and almoſt in " every Page there is what to laugh " at, and what to be delighted with. " Among his moſt lucky Thoughts I " muſt take notice of two, for the Like- " neſs that they bear to two moſt ce- " lebrated Paſſages of *Waller* and " Sir *John Denham*. *Waller* ſays, " &c. —— Sir *John Denham*, in his " Poem on *Cooper*'s-Hill, ſays to the " *Thames*,

" *Oh could I flow like thee, and make my*
" *Stream*
" *My great Example as it is my Theme:*
" *Tho' deep, yet clear; tho' gentle, yet not*
" *dull;*
" *Strong without Rage; without o'erflowing*
" *full.*

" *Camoens* (continues *Voltaire*) ad-
" dreſſes the Nymphs of *Tagus* in the
" like manner. *Oh Nymphs, if ever*
" *I ſung like you, inſpire me now*
" *with new and ſtrong Lays. Let*
" *my Stile flow like your Waves. Let*
" *it be deep and clear as your Wa-*
" *ters.*"

An *Engliſhman* who knows nothing of *Camoens*'s *Luſiadas*, or will not be at the Trouble to look into it, will believe what *Voltaire* here ſo confidently aſſures him of. But *Voltaire*, let me repeat,

repeat, is as ignorant of the *Portugueſe* as the *Italian* Language, although he decides ſo dogmatically about the Writings in either. Theſe are the Lines with which *Camoens addreſſes the Nymphs of Tagus.* CANTO I. Stanza iv and v.

O vos Tagides Minhas, pois criado
Tendes em me hum novo engenho ardente,
Se ſempre en verſo humilde celebrado
Foy de mim voſſo rio allegramente.
Dayme agora hum ſom alto e ſublimado,
Hum eſtilo grandiloquo e corrente,
Porque de voſſas agoas Febo ordene
Que naon tenhaon inveja as de Hipocrene.

Dayme huma furia grande e ſonoroſa,
E naon de agreſte Avena o Frauta ruda;
Mas de Tuba canora e bellicoſa,
Que o Peyto accende, e a cor ao geſto muda.
Dayme igual Canto aos Feytos da famoſa
Gente voſſa, a que Marte tanto ajuda,

Que ſe eſpalhe e cante no Univerſo,
Se taom ſublime preço cabe en verſo.

In *Engliſh* thus. " Oh ye, my " Nymphs of *Tagus*, ſince you have " inſpired me with new Fires; if " with my humble Verſes I have ever " freely celebrated your Deities, give " me now a Strain lofty and ſublime; " a Stile elevated, yet eaſy, ſince " *Apollo* hath beſtowed on your Wa- " ters a Power equal to thoſe of " *Hypocrene.*

" Inſpire an Enthuſiaſm grand and " ſonorus, that the Sound of my " Verſes may not reſemble that of " rural Pipes, or ruſtic Flutes, but of a " Trumpet, martial and ſhrill, which " may enflame my Boſom, and fill " it with Courage. Give me a Song " equal to the Labours of your fa- " mous People, the Favourite of *Mars*;

" a

" a Song which may reſound through-
" out the Univerſe, if Verſe is wor-
" thy of ſo ſublime an Honour.

Where is then the Reſemblance between theſe Lines of *Camoens* and thoſe of Sir *John Denham*, which *Voltaire* pretends to ſhow in his own falſe Tranſlation?

I have ſaid enough upon the Article of *Dante* to prove, notwithſtanding the Aſſertion of Mr. *Voltaire*, and many others of his Countrymen, that the *Italian* Poets are not ſo bad as they have been repreſented; and if this Diſcourſe of mine is favourably received, it will encourage me to reſume the Subject, and treat of ſome other of our Epic Poets who in *Italy* are not thought inferior to *Dante* in their ſeveral Ways; among whom are *Bojardo*, *Pulci*, and *Taſſo*. But I ſhall enlarge particularly upon *Arioſto*, who,

who, as I collect from *French* and *Engliſh* Authors, is not yet well underſtood by Foreigners; and I will endeavour to ſhow that it is true what our beſt Criticks ſay, that we, having ſuch a Poet, need not envy *Greece* its *Homer*, and *Latium Virgil*. *Arioſto* is generally allowed among us to be the greateſt of our Poets; and we deſervedly confer the ſame Honour on his *Orlando* that *Greece* did on the *Iliad*, learning it by heart, and ſinging it in the Streets both Day and Night. I will enlarge alſo upon our dramatic, lyric, paſtoral, dithirambic, and burleſque Poets, and always ſupport the Characters I ſhall give of them with Quotations from their Works in *Italian* and *Engliſh*.

I will only add, that I hope the Favourers of *Voltaire* will pardon the Freedom taken with him in my Reflections. A Freedom not inconſiſtent

with

with the Eſteem I have for ſome of his Writings. Though I have been a little ſevere againſt the *Eſſay on Epic Poetry* in *London*, yet I have ſhed Tears in *Paris* at the Repreſentation of *Zaïre*. We may deſpiſe the *Satire upon Man* though we praiſe the *Lutrin*, and laugh at the Tragedy of *Ageſilaus* though written by *Corneille*.

FINIS.

ERRATUM.

Page 29 firſt Note, for 1340, read 1265.

with the Eſſeem I have for ſome of his Writings. Though I have been a little fevet againſt the Eſſay on Epic Poetry in London, yet I have ſhed Tears in Paris at the Repreſentation of Zaire. We may deſpiſe the Satire when Men though we praiſe the Invention, and laugh at the Tragedy of Oedipus though written by Corneille.

FINIS.

ERRATUM.

Page 29 Laſt Note, for 1710, read 1685.